

1-1-2005

## Private Places, Public Spaces

Jim Stewart '76  
*Furman University*

Teri Bright  
*Furman University*

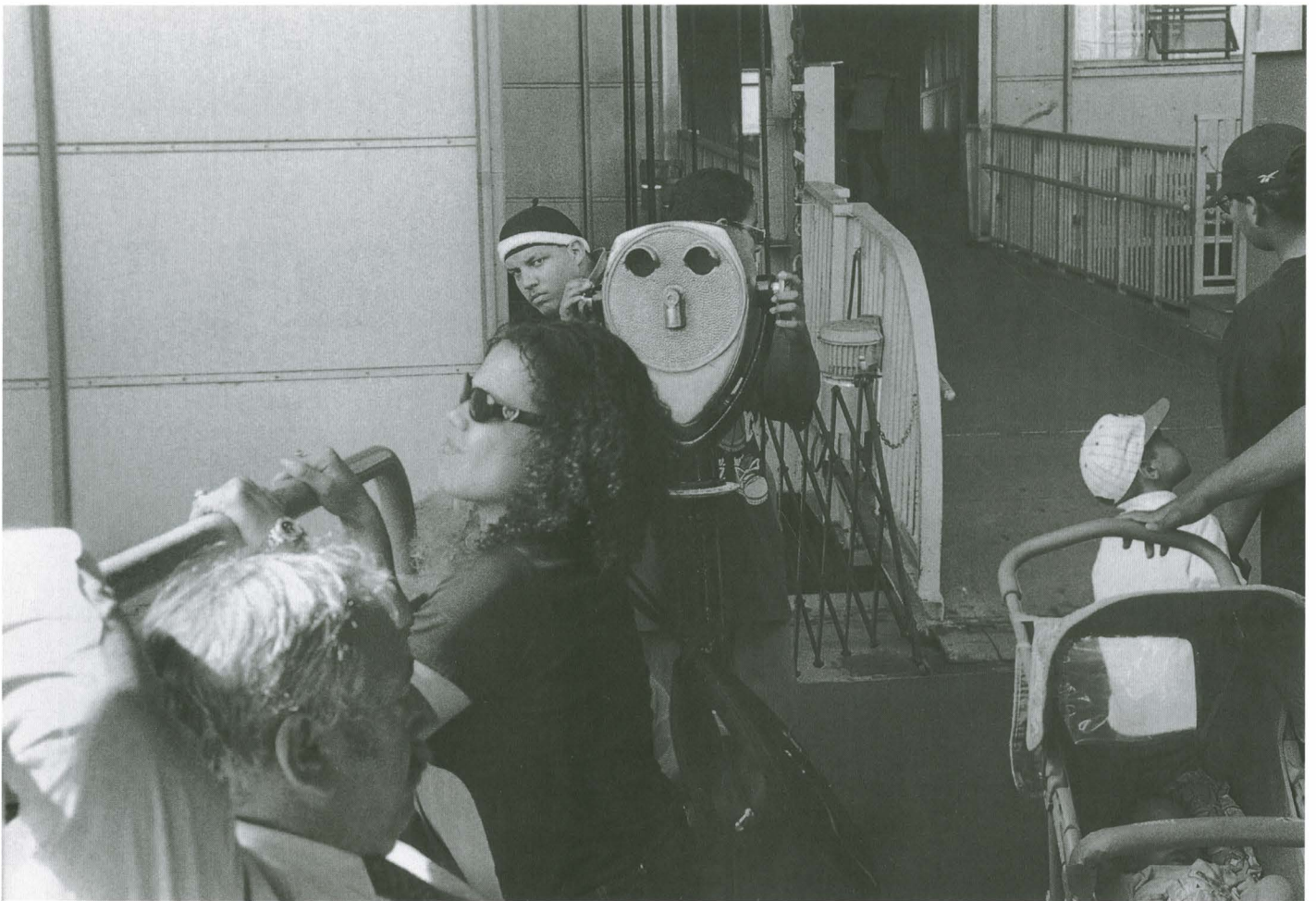
Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

---

### Recommended Citation

Stewart, Jim '76 and Bright, Teri (2005) "Private Places, Public Spaces," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 47 : Iss. 4 , Article 7.  
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol47/iss4/7>

This Article is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact [scholarexchange@furman.edu](mailto:scholarexchange@furman.edu).



1997

## Private Places, Public Spaces

**New York's** Staten Island Ferry has been transporting people from Manhattan to the borough of Staten Island since 1905. The five ferries in the fleet carry an estimated 65,000 passengers across New York harbor more than 100 times a day, 365 days a year.

Every half hour or so, business executives, students, mothers with strollers, shoppers and blue-collar workers crowd into the waiting area to prepare for boarding. With a clear view of the Statue of Liberty and the recently altered city skyline, the ferry is also a magnet for tourists.

In 1997, while working on her Master of Fine Arts degree, Furman art professor Terri Bright began a photographic project designed to investigate, in her words,

"social spaces, and the separation and presentation of our public and private selves." Specifically, she says, "I wanted to document the transitional space between the obligations of work and the responsibilities of home."

The urban commute, she realized, provided the means to pursue her interest. And the Staten Island Ferry, with its revolving cast of characters, diffuse light and mix of interior and exterior settings, seemed a good choice from which to observe and record the intersection between public and private.

Bright spent part of the summer of 1997 riding the ferry — she would often spend several hours per day crossing back and forth — and discreetly taking black and white portraits of selected

subjects. But then the demands of graduate school and, soon thereafter, her first full-time college teaching job at Furman took precedence. She put the project on hold.

Until, that is, the summer of 2004, when a grant from Furman's Research and Professional Growth Committee helped her return to New York, where she had lived and worked in the early 1990s, and resume her project.

This time, she detected a distinct change in the atmosphere on the ferry, which she attributed to the September 11 terrorist attacks. "There wasn't the same comfort level as before, for me or the other passengers," she says. "People were much more suspicious."

And indeed, Bright's 2004 efforts



2004

were curtailed after only a few weeks when a security officer approached her, asked what she was doing, and politely but firmly informed her that she would have to stop. Later, after she had packed up her equipment, he apologized while pointing out that he was only enforcing rules that had been in place since the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Still, she emerged with enough material for a compelling documentary series that examines the “private places within public spaces.” In some photos, she catches her subjects catching her in the act. Other photos depict how individuals mimic their environment, or how people within a few feet of each other appear completely unaware of what’s going on around them. The individual

photos are untitled because, Bright says, “The images are meant to be read together, not as separate stories.”

For Bright, whose work has been exhibited throughout the country, the Staten Island Ferry series also provided a self-imposed challenge to step out of her comfort zone and photograph people while documenting images of solitude and contemplation. In doing so, she allows us a brief glimpse at the kinds of moments that have become increasingly rare in today’s busy society.

— Jim Stewart ]

*The following pages feature selected photos from the Staten Island Ferry series, with commentary from the photographer.*

Photos by Terri Bright





2004

In documenting the intersection between public and private, I was able to explore the function of silence and reflection in an increasingly intrusive social landscape and to photograph the barriers that we employ to preserve this solitude.



1997



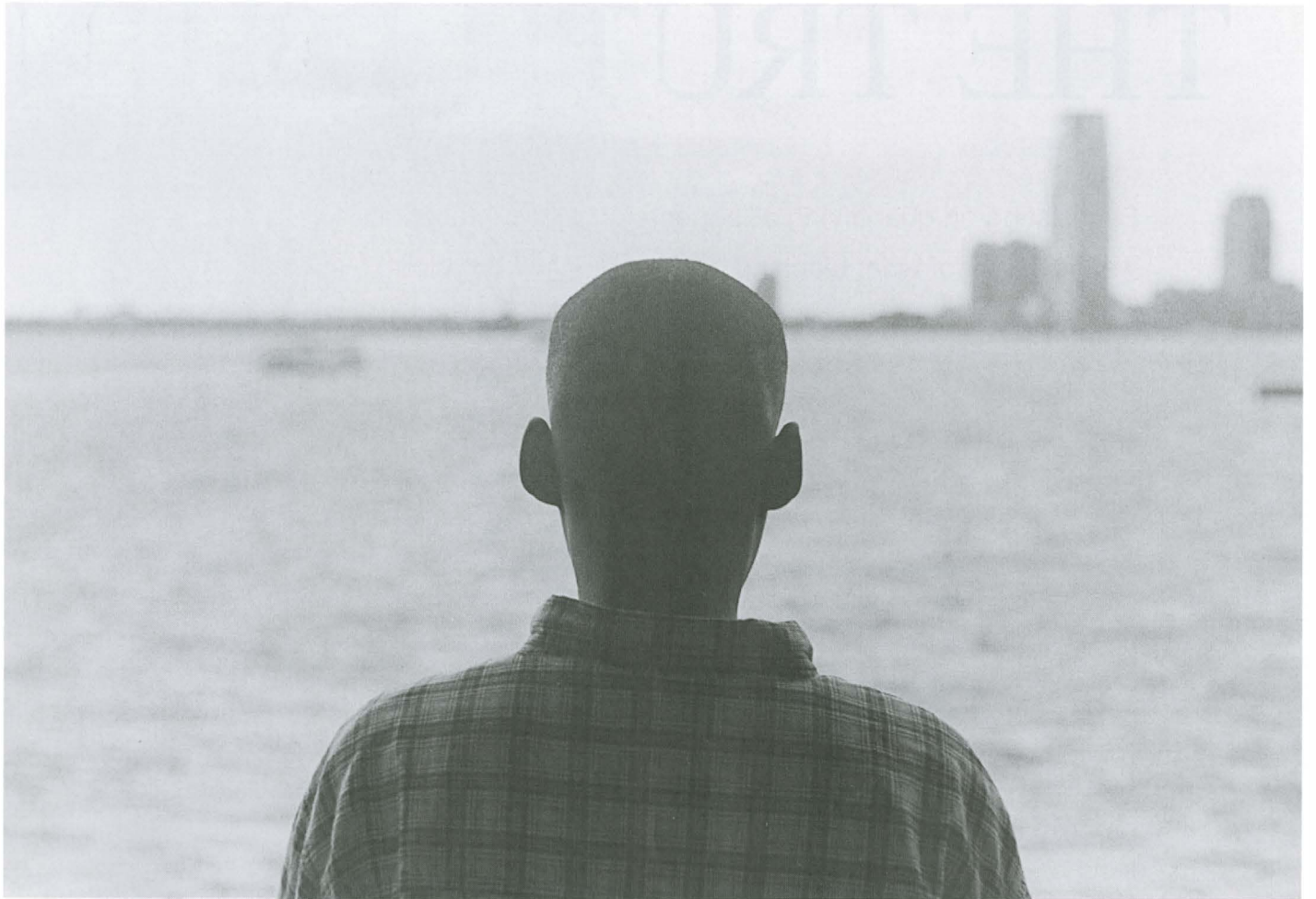


1997



2004





2004

For the urban commuters, the 25-minute ferry ride provides a respite from an otherwise chaotic day. The commute is a chance to be alone, lost in thought, quietly reading or contemplating the day's events.